

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 8, 2015

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2015–16 REGULAR SESSION

**ASSEMBLY BILL**

**No. 498**

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**Introduced by Assembly Member Levine**

February 23, 2015

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An act to amend Sections 1930 and 1930.5 of the Fish and Game Code, relating to fish and wildlife.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL’S DIGEST

AB 498, as amended, Levine. Wildlife conservation: wildlife corridors.

Existing law requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife to administer the Significant Natural Areas Program, and requires the department, among other things, to develop and maintain a spatial data system that identifies those areas in the state that are most essential for maintaining habitat connectivity, including wildlife corridors and habitat linkages. Existing law requires the department, contingent upon the provision of certain funding, to investigate, study, and identify those areas in the state that are most essential as wildlife corridors and habitat linkages and prioritize vegetative data development in those areas. Existing law requires the department to seek input from representatives of other state agencies, local government, federal agencies, nongovernmental conservation organizations, landowners, agriculture, recreation, scientific entities, and industry in determining essential wildlife corridors and habitat linkages.

This bill would declare that it is the policy of the state and all state agencies, with regard to a project proposed in an area identified as a wildlife corridor, to encourage the project proponent to consult with the department, and, wherever feasible and practicable, take steps to

~~protect~~ *promote, protect*, or restore the functioning of the wildlife corridor through various means, as applicable.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.

State-mandated local program: no.

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

1 SECTION 1. Section 1930 of the Fish and Game Code is  
2 amended to read:  
3 1930. The Legislature finds and declares that:  
4 (a) Areas containing diverse ecological and geological  
5 characteristics are vital to the continual health and well being of  
6 the state's natural resources and of its citizens.  
7 (b) Many habitats and ecosystems that constitute the state's  
8 natural diversity are in danger of being lost.  
9 (c) Connectivity between wildlife habitats is important to the  
10 long-term viability of the state's biodiversity.  
11 *(d) Preserving, restoring, and connecting high-quality habitat*  
12 *for wildlife can create habitat strongholds.*  
13 ~~(d)~~  
14 (e) Increasingly fragmented habitats threaten the state's wildlife  
15 species.  
16 ~~(e)~~  
17 (f) There is insufficient incentive for private landowners to  
18 maintain and perpetuate significant local natural areas in their  
19 natural state.  
20 ~~(f)~~  
21 (g) Efforts to preserve natural areas have been fragmented  
22 between federal, state, local, and private sectors.  
23 ~~(g)~~  
24 (h) Analysis of the state's habitat connectivity benefits from the  
25 consideration of all relevant data, including information from  
26 private and public landowners.  
27 ~~(h)~~  
28 (i) The department's existing mapping activities and products  
29 should be developed and sustained.  
30 ~~(i)~~  
31 (j) The importance of wildlife corridors to assist in adapting to  
32 climate change has been recognized by such groups as the Western  
33 Governor's Association, which unanimously approved a policy to

protect wildlife migration corridors and crucial wildlife habitat in 2007. Individual local, state, and federal agencies have also adopted policies aimed at protecting wildlife corridors and restoring habitat connectivity, in order to protect ecosystem health and biodiversity and to improve the resiliency of wildlife and their habitats to climate change. However, these efforts could be enhanced through establishment of a statewide policy to protect and restore important wildlife corridors and habitat linkages where feasible.

SEC. 2. Section 1930.5 of the Fish and Game Code is amended to read:

1930.5. (a) Contingent upon funding being provided by the Wildlife Conservation Board from moneys available pursuant to Section 75055 of the Public Resources Code, or from other appropriate bond funds, upon appropriation by the Legislature, the department shall investigate, study, and identify those areas in the state that are most essential as wildlife corridors and habitat linkages, as well as the impacts to those wildlife corridors from climate change, and shall prioritize vegetative data development in these areas.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature that the Wildlife Conservation Board use various funds to work with the department to complete a statewide analysis of wildlife corridors and connectivity to support conservation planning and climate change adaptation activities.

(c) It is the policy of the state to promote the protection of wildlife corridors, *habitat strongholds*, and habitat linkages in order to enhance the resiliency of wildlife and their habitats to climate change, protect biodiversity, and allow for the migration and movement of species by providing connectivity between habitat lands. In order to further these goals, it is the policy of the state and all state agencies, with regard to a project proposed in an area identified as a wildlife corridor, to encourage the project proponent to consult with the department, and, wherever feasible and practicable, take steps to ~~protect~~ *promote, protect*, or restore the functioning of the wildlife corridor through various means, as applicable. Those means may include, but are not necessarily limited to, acquisition or protection of wildlife corridors as open space through conservation easements, installing of ~~wildlife friendly~~ *wildlife-friendly* fencing, and provision of roadway

1 undercrossings and oversized culverts and bridges to allow for  
2 movement of wildlife between habitat areas, as applicable.

3 *(d) In adopting the policy described in subdivision (c), it is not*  
4 *the intent of the Legislature to create new regulatory requirements.*  
5 *The Legislature finds and declares that there are a number of*  
6 *existing programs, including, but not necessarily limited to,*  
7 *programs involving working landscapes, such as timberlands and*  
8 *rangelands, that are already working to achieve the policy*  
9 *described in subdivision (c).*

10 ~~(d)~~

11 *(e) For purposes of this chapter, “wildlife the following terms*  
12 *have the following meanings:*

13 *(1) “Habitat stronghold” means high-quality habitat that*  
14 *supports wildlife in being more resilient to increasing pressures*  
15 *on species due to climate change and land development.*

16 *(2) “Wildlife corridor” means a habitat linkage that joins two*  
17 *or more areas of wildlife habitat, allowing for the movement of*  
18 *wildlife from one area to another.*